

DEFINITIONS

IMPORTANT FARMLANDS

Prime Farmlands

General Criteria. Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses (the land could be cropland, pastureland, rangeland, forest land, or other land, but not urban built-up land or water). It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce, economically, sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed, including water management, according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmlands have an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. They are permeable to water and air.

Prime farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding. Examples of soils that qualify as prime farmland are Palouse silt loam, zero to seven percent slopes; Brookston silty clay loam, drained; and Tama silty clay loam, zero to five percent slopes.

Specific Criteria. Prime farmlands must meet all the following criteria. Terms used in this section are defined in these USDA publications: "Soil Taxonomy, Agriculture Handbook 436," "Soil Survey Manual, Agriculture Handbook 18," "Rainfall-Erosion Losses from Cropland, Agriculture Handbook 282," "Wind Erosion Forces in the United States and Their Use in Predicting Soil Loss, Agriculture Handbook 346," and "Saline and Alkali Soils, Agriculture Handbook 60."

A. The soils have:

1. Aquic, udic, ustic, or xeric moisture regimes and sufficient available water capacity greater than 5 inches within a depth of 40 inches, or in the root zone (root zone is the part of the soil that is penetrated by plant roots) if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep, to produce the commonly grown cultivated crops (cultivated crops include but are not limited to grain, forage, fiber, oilseed, sugar, beets, sugarcane, vegetables, tobacco, orchard, vineyard, and bush fruit

crops) adapted to the region in seven or more years out of ten; or

2. Xeric or ustic moisture regimes in which the available water capacity is limited, but the area has a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable (a dependable water supply is one in which enough water is available for irrigation in eight out of ten years for the crops commonly grown) and of adequate quality; or

3. Aridic or torric moisture regimes, and the area has a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality; and

B. The soils have a temperature regime that is frigid, mesic, thermic, or hyperthermic (pergelic and cryic regimes are excluded). These are soils that, at a depth of 20 inches, have a mean annual temperature higher than 32 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, the mean summer temperature at this depth in soils with an 0 horizon is higher than 47 degrees Fahrenheit; in soils that have no 0 horizon, the mean summer temperature is higher than 59 degrees Fahrenheit; and

C. The soils have a pH between 4.5 and 8.4 in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches or in the root zone if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep; and

D. The soils either have no water table or have a water table that is maintained at a sufficient depth during the cropping season to allow cultivated crops common to the area to be grown; and

E. The soils can be managed so that in all horizons within a depth of 40 inches or in the root zone if the root zone is less than 40 inches deep, during part of each year the conductivity of the saturation extract is less than four mmhos/cm and the exchangeable sodium percentage is less than 15; and

F. The soils are not flooded frequently during the growing season (less often than once in two years); and

G. The product of "K" (erodibility factor) times the percent slope is less than 2.0, and the product of "I" (soils erodibility) times "C" (climatic factor) does not exceed 60; and

H. The soils have a permeability rate of at least 0.06 inches per hour in the upper 20 inches, and the mean annual soil temperature at a depth of 20 inches is less than 59 degrees Fahrenheit or higher; and

I. Less than ten percent of the surface layer (upper six inches) in these soils consists of rock fragments coarser than three inches; and

J. Soils with a calcium carbonate equivalent greater than ten percent within ten inches of the surface and are not intergrades to an aquic moisture regime are excluded e.g. Ethan, Sisseton, and Zell soils.

Unique Farmland

General Criteria. Unique farmland is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce, economically, sustained high-quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Examples of such crops are citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, fruit, and vegetables.

Specific Characteristics. Unique farmland is used for a specific high-value food or fiber crop. It has a moisture supply that is adequate for the specific crops; the supply is from stored moisture, precipitation, or a developed irrigation system. It combines favorable factors of soil quality, growing season, temperature, humidity, air drainage, elevation, aspect, or other conditions, such as nearness to market, that favor the growth of a specific food or fiber crop.

Additional Farmland of Statewide Importance

This is land, in addition to prime and unique farmlands, that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Criteria for defining and delineating this land are to be determined by the appropriate state agency or agencies. Generally, additional farmlands of statewide importance include those that are nearly prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce as high a yield as prime farmlands if conditions are favorable. In some states, additional farmlands of statewide importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by state law.

Additional Farmland of Local Importance

In some local areas, there is concern for certain additional farmlands for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops, even though these lands are not identified as having national or statewide importance. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by the local agency or agencies concerned.

PRIME FOREST LANDS

Because of the multiple use of forested lands, several categories, e.g., timber, wildlife, and recreation, may be developed. For purposes of this regulation only, the following timberland definitions will apply.

Prime Timberland

Prime timberland is land that has soil capable of growing wood at the rate of 85 cubic feet or more/acre/year (at culmination of mean annual increment) in natural stands and is not in urban or built-up land uses or water. Generally speaking, this is land currently in forest, but does not exclude qualifying lands that could realistically be returned to forest. Delineation of these lands will be in accordance with national criteria.

Unique Timberland

Unique timberlands are lands that do not qualify as prime timberland on the basis of producing less than 85 cubic feet/acre/year, but are growing sustained yields of specific high value species or species capable of producing specialized wood products under a silvicultural system that maintains soil productivity and protects water quality. Delineation of these lands will be in accordance with national criteria.

Timberland of Statewide Importance

This is land, in addition to prime and unique timberlands, that is of statewide importance for the growing of wood. Criteria for defining and delineating these lands are to be determined by state forestry planning committees or appropriate state organizations.

Timberland of Local Importance

In some local areas, there is concern for certain additional forest lands for the growing of wood, even though these lands are not identified as having national or statewide importance. Where appropriate, these lands are to be identified by a local agency or agencies concerned.

WETLANDS 1/

Wetlands are those areas that are inundated by surface or ground water with a frequency sufficient to support and, under normal circumstances, do or would support a prevalence of vegetative or aquatic life that requires saturated or seasonally saturated soil conditions for growth and reproduction. Wetlands generally include swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas, such as sloughs, potholes, wet meadows, river overflows, mudflats, and natural ponds.

FLOOD PLAINS 1/

The term "flood plains" means that the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters, including floodprone areas of offshore islands, including, at a minimum, those that are subject to a one percent or greater chance of flooding in any given year.

PRIME RANGELAND 2/

Prime rangeland is rangeland which, because of its soil, climate, topography, vegetation, and location, has

the highest quality or value for grazing animals. The (potential) natural vegetation is palatable, nutritious, and available to the kinds of herbivores common to the area.

1/ Definitions contained in Executive Orders 11988 and 11990.

2/ USDA proposed definition for interdepartmental use only.